

Neighborhood Description –

One of Asheville's oldest neighborhoods, next to downtown, The West End/ Clingman Avenue Neighborhood (WECAN) is bordered on the north by I240 and Patton Avenue, on the south by Lyman Street, on the east by the Clingman Forest and on the west by the French Broad River. WECAN has been awarded two National Register Historic District nominations, one residential and one called the Riverside Industrial District that exists within the boundaries of the current River Arts District. The neighborhoods were developed between 1900 and 1920 and still have some narrow curving streets, smaller houses and small lots. The area covers some 130 acres and 273 separate tax lots and in 1994 had some 149 households.

Neighborhood History –

The West End was what people called the westernmost part of the village of Asheville in the early 1880's. The railroad came to Asheville in 1881 and by 1892 factories were built along the river. Several mansions were built in the 1890s in an area developed as Prospect Park because of the views of the river and Mount Pisgah. In 1902 the Park Avenue School was built as was Riverside Drive. Neighborhoods grew up as housing for railroad and factory workers and their families. There were churches and grocery stores, a barber shop, a drug store and a club house with the first indoor plumbing—which many homes lacked.

Clingman Avenue was originally called Depot Street and was served by a trolley that took people from the Railroad Depot to Pack Square. By the 1920's the street and its tributaries were settled by 'negro' families whose children could not attend the Park Avenue School. They had a grocery store, a bakery, a drug store, a hospital, two churches and their own school on Hill Street. While early on there were a few white families, by the 1920's it was almost completely segregated.

The West Asheville Bridge was first built in the 1920s and in the late 1960's it was replaced by the Haywood Road Connector that ran from Clingman Avenue taking out dozens of houses and dividing Park Avenue and Jefferson Drive in the process.

The area was prosperous through the 1930's and 1940's. The buildings now known as Phil Mechanic Studios & The Wedge Studios were built by Farmer's Federated, an agricultural Co-op, in the early 1920's and Farmer's Federated helped improve & modernize crops / animal husbandry and their marketing across Western North Carolina and beyond until the end of the 1950's. The first span of the Smoky Park Bridge was built in 1948 and cut through the Chicken Hill neighborhood taking several houses and small businesses. The Cotton Mill closed in 1949 putting many people out of work. Mill properties and railroad properties were sold off and no new houses were built for over fifty years. In the late 1960's and 1970s major transportation projects like the second span of the Smoky Park Bridge, the Cross Town Expressway and the Open Cut were built. Hilliard Avenue had ploughed west through to the Queen Carson School site in 1968. Asheville Transit's bus garage was built there and part of the road was four lanes wide with no sidewalks. In the 1970's, WECAN neighbor, Matthew Bacoate was the general manager of AFRAM, the "largest black-owned business in Asheville's history", which occupied 115-129 Roberts Street, now The Wedge Studios.

So, the West End and Clingman Avenue developed as two physically and culturally separated neighborhoods. For the next 25 years there was some gradual loss of housing stock on both sides, some vacant lots appeared, and the area enjoyed benign neglect.

Then in 1994 the City Council asked the Planners to create a plan for the area to be called West End/Clingman Avenue identifying it as an important connection between downtown and The French Broad Riverfront. They also anticipated commercial development pressure on residential areas and the need for rehabilitation of infrastructure. Before the plan was completed there was a spectacular fire in April 1995 which took out the old Cotton Mill and the Earle Chesterfield Mill. Unlike the disastrous flood of 1916 there were no lives lost. In 1994 the neighborhood vision was to be left alone. The WECAN 2010 Neighborhood Plan was adopted by City Council in January 1996. One goal under Neighborhood Enhancement was to 'Promote the involvement of residents and property owners in decisions regarding the future of the neighborhood.' The first recommendation was 'To create a neighborhood organization.' Homeowners and residents of both neighborhoods came together to work on organizing, planning and litter clean ups. In December 1997 the membership adopted by-laws and elected a board. The purpose of the organization was articulated 'To promote community revitalization and to provide a vehicle to guide area improvements.' In early 2000 a vision workshop articulated goals to: 1) Develop a Neighborhood Plan, 2) Visually unite and Identify the neighborhood, 3) Develop a Living History 4) Hold a Carnival fundraiser. In November 2000 the team of Correa Valle Valle led a visioning charrette with 150 citizen participants and 60 focus session participants. That plan called for changes to the building codes to protect historic buildings, improve the quality of infill structures and allow for greater developmental density in line with New Urbanism and Smart Growth principles.

Since then the WECAN organization has continued holding open monthly meetings, held quarterly adopt a highway litter pick-ups and published an annual newsletter. Other things seen include neighborhood clean-ups, a history

exhibit, a neighborhood sign, public art, new sidewalks, oral histories, a new park, a community garden, a documentary video, Clingman Avenue improvements (bike lane, traffic bulb outs and a traffic circle), a bike repair station, bus stop kiosks, a Farmers Market, new playground equipment at Aston Park, LED street lighting, '13 Bones' pedestrian bridge at the Jean Webb Park, ~~seen~~ plans funded to construct the RAD TIP and the Clingman Forest Greenway, the I-26 Connector, and rising property values.

WECAN has also seen the loss of 11 houses as well as the historic Ice Storage House and 'Club House' and Dave Steel Plant. At the same time at least 76 new residential units in some 20 new buildings (including Merritt Park Condos, Clingman Lofts and Prospect Terrace) were constructed. In addition, we are grateful for the recent rehab of one of our most beloved historic structures @ 6 Rector Street by Luke Perry. There are also plans in the immediate future for 200 units at RAD Lofts, 150 units at Patton Place Apartments and 40 new affordable units at Hilliard and Clingman and more infill housing under construction in West End. There has also been a turnover of many properties and only a fraction of the population from 1997 still lives in WECAN.

(The WECAN Citizens Master Plan is available online at [www.ashevillenc.gov/departments/ Planning and Urban Design/ Neighborhood Plans/ West End/Clingman Avenue](http://www.ashevillenc.gov/departments/Planning_and_Urban_Design/Neighborhood_Plans/West_End/Clingman_Avenue). WECAN is also on Face Book at [West End/Clingman Avenue Neighborhood/WECAN](http://www.facebook.com/WestEndClingmanAvenueNeighborhoodWECAN) & also online at <http://wecannews.blogspot.com>)

Neighborhood Vision –

It has been, until now, the unwritten vision of WECAN to be open to all who want to live here or participate in the neighborhood organization. All incomes, races, gender/gender identities are welcome and respected. As an organization, WECAN is frugal, inclusive, patient, persistent and practical. There is no one type of WECAN-er. If anything we are a group of independent individuals who come together to champion affordability, safety and healthy living. We see WECAN as a great place to live and raise a family or to work or play or retire.

WECAN encourages anyone who choses to impact any part of the neighborhood, in any way, to come speak with WECAN first! WECAN Board meets the First Thursday of every month, at 6:30pm at 64 Clingman Avenue in the Jessie Nell Coleman Board Room in the Mountain Housing Opportunities offices. Any questions? contact WECAN at patti torino@gmail.com byronb@buncombe.main.nc.us

Neighborhood Strengths –

Effective organization, caring, improving communication, knowledge and respect of our history, excellent documentation, good working relationship with city departments, inclusive, respectful, ability to do a lot with very little, proximity to a diverse array of community, cultural, transportation and recreational amenities; natural beauty, amazing sunset views, a deep history of co-existence, community gardens and old growth trees and an appreciation of these things, a farmer's market, children growing up here, folks who look after one another, birth place of the River Arts District which houses over 200 working artists bringing life back to a vibrant part of our working history.

Neighborhood Challenges –

Brown fields, dumping, flood plains, prostitution, drugs, perpetual homeless camping along state roads, highways and the river, pedestrian access to playgrounds and greenways, grade level railroad crossings, vacant lots, groundhog infestations, invasive vegetation, absentee landowners, abandoned properties, threatened historic properties, gentrification, loss of affordability, excessive speed and volume of cut through and normal traffic, lack of proper infrastructure including storm water facilities, sewer systems, roadway vegetative maintenance, sidewalks on Roberts and West Haywood Street, narrow roadways & roads that end abruptly, short term rentals, threatened older trees, 150% population increase, property turnover and displacement of African American residents, new residents creating new problems that come from among other things, a wider range of economic backgrounds than in years past, lack of parking, Historic district nomination, proposed hotels, unanswered questions about the future of the transit facility and several NCDOT properties and it is very difficult to communicate with them.

Neighborhood Responsibility

Continue participation in planning processes and to be an advocate for neighborhood livability, for all neighbors, with the city and the NC DOT.

Alignment with City Council Goals:

Equity and Diversity; Inclusive, diverse, fair & balanced, strategic goals: health, education, housing& economic mobility.

Land Use and Planning :pedestrian oriented, mixed use, affordable, community garden, edible landscape,greenways

Energy and Environment; Tree city, urban forest,

A Home for everyone; diversity, safety,

Moving People; Multimodal, car-optional,

A Thriving Local Economy; living wages, diverse economy

Working Together: transparent government, empowered community, engaged neighborhood.

Strong Management; financial responsibility,

Alignment with 2025 Comp Plan.